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INAUGURAL
DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED

BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY IN CAMBRIDGE,

AUGUST 10, 1819.

.....
BY ANDREWS NORTON,

Dexter Professor of Sacred Literature.
.....

—
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NOTE.

On account of the length of the following discourse a considerable portion of it was omitted in the delivery. The whole is now printed.

CONSTITUTION AND RULES
OF THE
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY IN CAMBRIDGE.

THE Theological Department, or Faculty of Theology of the University, shall comprise the President and the following Professors.

1. The Alford Professor of Natural Religion and Moral Philosophy, who shall lecture and teach in these subjects according to the statutes of the Alford Professorship, and the regulations established, not repugnant thereto, by the College law.

2. The Hollis Professor of Divinity, who shall give instruction to the theological students in positive and controversial divinity, including the evidences, and principles of natural religion, and the evidences, doctrines, and duties of revealed religion: said Professor performing all the duties of the Hollis Professorship which he holds.

3. The Hancock Professor of Hebrew and other Oriental Languages, who is to give instruction in those languages, and in their application to the interpretation of the scriptures.

4. A Professor of Sacred Literature, or expository theology, who shall treat of the criticism and interpretation of the scriptures.

5. A Professor of Pastoral Theology, who shall give instruction in the duties of the pastoral office, and the composition and delivery of sermons.

6. A Professor who shall treat of sacred and ecclesiastical history, including Jewish antiquities, and of church order.

7. The Professors in either of the above branches may, in their instructions, omit the particular consideration of such subjects in their respective departments, as may be pointed out by the Corporation, said subjects being sufficiently discussed by other Professors and Instructors in the University.

8. The Professor in the fourth department shall be denominated the Dexter Professor of Sacred Literature.

9. The Dexter Professor, and the Professors of Pastoral Theology, and of Ecclesiastical History shall perform such duties in the theological instruction of the University, as may from time to time be assigned by the Corporation, always including, with respect to the Dexter Professor, those specified by the Corporation of the College and the Trustees of the Society for promoting Theological Education at the University, who are in part the founders of this Professorship.

10. The Professors to be appointed shall have the privileges and powers pertaining to the Professors of the College generally, as well as make the usual promises and engagements.

11. Graduates of any public College or University are permitted to reside at the University as students of divinity, having the assent of the Faculty of Theology, and conforming to the laws and regulations made for the government of such students and of resident graduates generally.

12. Applications are to be made in person or by letter to one of the members of the Faculty, and when distance or

other circumstances require, must be accompanied by testimonials of good abilities, literary progress, and an unblemished character.

13. All students in divinity are to be matriculated by signing with the President an engagement to conform to all the laws of the University made for their government.

14. All theological students residing at the University, who have not completed the usual course of theological studies, shall belong to the seminary, and attend the public and private instruction of the same ; provided the Faculty may, in special cases, dispense with portions of this attendance. No one will receive the pecuniary aid of the Institution or have the usual testimonial, unless he has been regular in attending the course of exercises and studies prescribed, as well as exemplary in every part of his conduct.

15. The Faculty will, at the beginning of each college year, and in the course of the year, when there may be occasion, make a report to the Corporation on the distribution and application of the Hopkins foundations, the funds of the society for promoting theological education, and other sums appropriated to the benefit of students in divinity ; and the orders for the sums allowed will be given half yearly by the President, he receiving previously to the issuing of any order, a certificate from the instructor or instructors, on whom each student shall attend, that he has diligently pursued the course of studies and exercises appointed.

16. There shall be an annual examination of the Seminary by a Board of Visitors to be appointed for that purpose.

JOHN T. KIRKLAND, *President*.

Aug. 1819.

INAUGURAL DISCOURSE.

THE liberality of our citizens, and especially of one distinguished individual, who bore a name which has long been honored, and which I hope will long continue to be honored among us, having afforded new facilities for theological instruction in this University, an additional professorship has in consequence been founded. About to enter on the duties of this new office, I have thought, that it would not be uninteresting or useless to speak of the extent and relations of the science of theology, or in other words, of the intellectual acquisitions and endowments required to constitute a consummate theologian. I can, it is true, do little more than lead you to an eminence, and point out hastily the grand features of the prospect which lies before us ; but even this rapid view may not be altogether unprofitable.

In such a survey as I have proposed, it is in its relations to metaphysics, that theology may be first considered. It treats of God, and of man considered as an immortal being. Upon these subjects revelation has taught us truths the most important ; and some of the noblest and most powerful efforts of human reason have been employed in deducing the same truths from the moral and physical phenomena by which we are surrounded. It is one part of the business of a theologian to make himself familiar with those reasonings, by which the mind, now that it has been educated by christianity, is able, even when left to its own powers and resources, to establish or render probable the truths of religion. He must become the interpreter of the works and providence of God ; and qualify himself to perceive the harmony between the two revelations which God has given us ;—that, which is taught us by the laws which govern the world, as they proceed in their regular operation ; and that, whose divine origin was attested by the presence of a power controlling and suspending those laws. He will find a perfect harmony between them ; and will perceive that the

evidences of both, though derived from sources the most remote from each other, flow together at last, and bear us on to one common object, the truth of the essential principles of religion.

Yet notwithstanding the strength of argument by which these principles are supported, we cannot but remark that our conclusions are embarrassed by some difficulties ; and we know that scepticism has labored to overthrow all our reasonings. The theologian, in pursuing his inquiries respecting these difficulties and objections, if he be determined to follow them to the uttermost, will be obliged to go on to the very limits of human knowledge ; to the barriers which the mind has not yet passed, and which perhaps are impassable. He must fix a steady attention upon ideas very abstract, shadowy and inadequate. Where the last rays begin to be lost in utter darkness, he must distinguish in the doubtful twilight between deceptive appearances, and the forms of things really existing. He must subject to a strict scrutiny words and expressions which often deceive us, and often mock us with only a show of meaning. He must engage in complicated and diffi-

cult processes of reasoning, in which the terms of language, divested of all their usual associations, become little more than algebraic symbols ; and in pursuing these processes, he must proceed with the greatest attention and accuracy, because a single false step may render his conclusions altogether erroneous.

The inquiries to which we are led by the objections of the sceptic, are curious, and in some respects important. But they are not those in which a man of sound mind will habitually delight. He will pass from them to studies more satisfactory, and which have a more direct influence upon the conduct and happiness of men, with feelings similar to those of the voyager, who having visited the barren though wonderful regions of polar solitude, where the sun dazzles without warming, is returning to a mild, inhabited, and cultivated climate. In respect to the metaphysical objections to our faith, it is to be remembered that the triumph over religion cannot be an early, but must be the last and most difficult achievement of scepticism. The temple in which we worship is placed within the citadel of human reason ; and before it can be ap-

proached for the purpose of destruction, almost all our knowledge must have been surrendered. He who doubts the existence of God, has left himself no truth dependant on moral evidence, which he can reasonably believe.

In natural religion, we learn the character of God by a wide induction from the laws of his moral government, and from the objects and phenomena of the physical world. Here then is another field of study opened to the theologian. We are surrounded by an unknown and immeasurable power, which is every moment producing motion and life, and manifesting itself by effects the most astonishing and admirable. We must study the character of this power in its works. In order to do this, we must borrow aid from that science which has *wheeled in triumph through the signs of heaven*. We must enter the lecture room of the anatomist, and learn how *fearfully and wonderfully we are made*. And we must follow the student of nature to the fields, and woods, and waters, and inquire of the objects to which he directs us, what they can teach of their Maker. These studies are important, not merely as furnish-

ing materials for argument, but because they awaken, and render vivid, our feelings of devotion. In contemplating the perfections of God without reference to his works, they present themselves to us as metaphysical abstractions, which in their obscurity and vastness almost mock our comprehension. But when we turn to his works, we perceive his power, wisdom, and goodness embodied, as it were, and rendered visible.

But our religious faith rests for its main support on what we believe the declarations of God, communicated by Jesus Christ. What then is the evidence that Jesus Christ was indeed the messenger of God? This inquiry is connected with the whole history of God's miraculous dispensations, and will lead the theologian to the study of all the evidence relating to these subjects. Upon entering on this study, when he inquires what it is which is to be proved, he will find that a mass of statements and propositions of very different importance, have been blended together; and his first object must be, to distinguish and separate those, the truth of which it is indeed essential to maintain. He will then have for his purpose, to make himself

acquainted with the whole evidence, by which these essential truths are to be defended, to view the subject in all its relations, and to be aware of every objection and difficulty. His faith must not be the offspring of prejudice and ignorance, confident only because it has not examined, and ready to think an insult a good answer to an objection ; nor a timid and doubtful belief, always liable to be startled by some unexpected disclosure, the result of that state of mind, in which one has proceeded in his inquiries only so far, as to perceive that much remains to be settled. The proof of the miraculous dispensations of God consists in a series of the most remarkable phenomena, which, if we reject the belief of such interpositions, can be accounted for by no other causes ; and which have marked the whole history of man with a track of light, like that of the setting sun upon the ocean. It is confirmed, I will venture to add, by the antecedent probability of such communications from God to man. In making himself acquainted with the evidences of our religion, as they have been commonly stated, the theological student will perceive, that it is only a portion of its proof which

has yet been collected and arranged ; and that in the most able works which we have on the subject, that of Paley for instance, is to be found only an abridgment, or a passing notice of many important arguments, while others are wholly omitted. Even in order to feel the full force of those arguments to which his attention may be directly called, he must apply the results of his own inquiries to the statements which may be laid before him. We speak for instance of that evidence for our religion, which arises from the intrinsic divinity of its character. But in order to estimate this evidence justly, we must compare our religion with the systems of philosophy and morals by which it was preceded. It was indeed a most marvellous event, and wholly out of the sphere of natural causes, that one who had never entered the schools of human wisdom, who had lived all his life in the midst of the gross ignorance, the inveterate prejudices, and the habitual and degrading vices of Galilean Jews, surrounded by a people not more cultivated nor intellectual than those who now occupy the same land, that such a one should make known to mankind a universal religion, the

most pure, the most holy, and the most powerful in its operation. But in order to feel in all its force how marvellous a thing this was, we must know how much, or rather how little, had been previously effected by the efforts of the wisest and most enlightened of men. We must study their works, and we must make ourselves acquainted with the moral and religious state of mankind, which preceded and was contemporary with the introduction of Christianity.—In considering the external evidences of our religion, the theologian, if he be determined to view the subject in all its relations, will find himself conducted into the most difficult parts of ecclesiastical history, placed upon *debateable ground*, where there are guides enough to be sure, but few whom he can safely trust; where he must compare the reports of one with those of another, and examine for himself, and rely upon his own judgment. And though the result will be, I trust, the full confirmation of his faith, yet the opinions with which he concludes, may not be altogether the same as those with which he commenced his inquiries. When he comes to the study of the scriptures, in proportion as he removes

all the accumulated rubbish of technical theology, under which their meaning has been buried, and obtains a distinct view of it, he will discern new and very striking evidence of the truth of our religion. It is evidence, but a small portion of which has yet been distinctly stated by any writer. We have indeed scarcely any work relating to it, except that very valuable one of Paley, his *Horæ Paulinæ*. It is evidence which arises from the agreement of the New Testament with itself, the coincidence and correspondence of its different parts, and its agreement with all our knowledge respecting that state of things, which existed during the time of the first preaching of Christianity. The New Testament consists of different writings, comprizing accounts of our Saviour's ministry, some account of the ministry of his apostles, particularly of that of St. Paul, many discourses of the former, and various letters written by the latter. The whole history which we here find is consistent with itself; and the discourses and letters are consistent with the history, and even cannot be understood without a careful study of the latter; nor for the most part without

forming a distinct conception of the particular occasion of their delivery or composition. These discourses and writings reflect, as it were, the ever varying circumstances, which marked that most extraordinary state of things, produced by the ministry of our Saviour and his apostles. They have a relation throughout to the strong prejudices, the unfounded and extravagant expectations, the narrow conceptions, the limited knowledge, and the violent and vacillating passions of those to whom they were addressed. Nor is this coincidence of which I speak confined to discourses and writings ; it appears also in what was done by our Saviour and his apostles. It is a correspondence of their words and actions to all that we know, or can reasonably infer, respecting the very peculiar circumstances in which they acted and taught ; a correspondence, at the same time, to which it was clearly not the purpose of the writer to direct the attention of his readers. This correspondence appears throughout the New Testament, ramifying into numberless particulars, spreading every where, and binding every part together. As we pursue our inquiries, it assumes at last a character so re-

markable and decisive, as I may venture to say, puts out of question all supposition of fiction in the history, or forgery in the writings. No human artifice could approach toward giving such a perfect imitation of nature, with all its accidents, and all its minute and latent characteristics. And why has not this internal evidence of the truth of our religion been more regarded? I answer, because the scriptures have been for the most part so imperfectly understood; because their meaning has been seen blurred and distorted through the medium of gross theological errors. It is a subject which particularly claims the attention of the theological student.

The study of the Bible, and particularly of the New Testament, is, perhaps more than any other, the peculiar province of the theologian. In pursuing this study, he must acquaint himself with all that collection of facts and rules, by the application of which the original text of the sacred writings is recovered as far as possible. He must be master of the languages in which they are written; an acquaintance with which should be one of the first, and will continue to be one of the last

objects of his attention. He must be, in the most comprehensive sense of the word, a philologist. The meaning of scripture is controverted in every part, and he must therefore be acquainted with the art of interpreting language, an art, of the very existence of which, many of those who have decided most confidently respecting the sense of the sacred writings, appear to have been wholly ignorant ; and the principles of which have never yet, I think, been fully explained. To this end he must study the nature and constitution of language, generally, and as it appears in different particular forms in which it has existed. This is a subject which will lead him at once to the most curious and important branches of metaphysical inquiry, and one which is connected with the whole history of the revolutions and development of the human mind, and of the changes and accidents of human opinions and sentiments. In tracing this history, he must learn to mark with a practiced eye, the varying composition, and changeable coloring of human ideas, which are continually forming new combinations of meaning, while the old disappear, to be expressed by the same unalter-

ed words, while the same language remains in use, or by words apparently correspondent in the languages which may succeed it. Words, as well as coins, change their value with the progress of society.—By studying the character of language, the philologist and theologian will discover its intrinsic ambiguity and imperfection. He will learn what has been but very imperfectly understood, that words taken alone are often inadequate to convey any one definite meaning; and that the meaning which the words themselves leave thus loose and unsettled, is to be fixed and defined by reference to extrinsic considerations. He will therefore perceive that a mere critical knowledge of the languages in which the scriptures are composed, (and the same is true of other writings,) is but the first step towards their explanation. In order to know in any particular instance, what is the true meaning of words, it is often necessary to know under what circumstances and relations they were used in that particular instance. The theologian therefore will proceed to collect and arrange all that immense variety of facts and truths, in connexion with which the language of the scriptures must

be viewed, in order to perceive its bearing and relations ; and some one or more of which is continually entering as a principal element into all those reasonings by which its sense is determined. With these facts and truths he will make himself familiar. Without previous knowledge of this sort, the words of the scriptures, or of any other ancient writings, will often convey as false ideas and impressions to the mind, as a historical picture might give to one wholly ignorant of the story which forms its subject.

I have said that the expositor of scripture must be a philologist in the most extensive sense of the word. But in order to this, he must have the feelings and imagination of a poet. Without these poetry cannot be understood. Its interpreter must have the power of sympathizing with him by whom it is composed. The images and emotions of the writer must excite corresponding images and emotions in his own mind. But the Old Testament is full of poetry ; and in the New Testament, the oriental and popular style which prevails, often requires no less than poetry itself, an acquaintance with all the uses of language, and with all the forms

in which feeling, passion, and imagination express themselves, in order to distinguish and disengage the mere literal meaning from all those images and ideas, with which it is associated.

But another part of the business of a theologian is to trace the history of our religion, and its effects upon the condition of society. In other words, he must be familiar with ecclesiastical history. In this study, one of the most interesting objects of attention will be the origin and progress of those enormous errors, which have cast their shade over the christian world, and intercepted the influence of the gospel. He will discover that many of these errors belong to an earlier age than Christianity itself; and that their sources are to be found in the superstitions, and still more in the philosophy, which existed before our religion was preached to men. The converts to our faith did not yield up their minds to its reception with an entire renunciation of every former belief and prepossession. They did not divest themselves of all previous trains of thought and reasoning, and all previous imaginations and sentiments. The light which spread over the

world was mingled with the darkness which before prevailed ; and God did not, as in the beginning, divide the light from the darkness. Men received much which was true, but they also retained much which was false ; and truth and falsehood grew up together, and constituted the religion which was professed. The past and present errors of Christians are many of them to be traced to a heathen origin, and especially to the heathen philosophy. The theologian therefore, who, in studying the evidences of our religion, had before been led to consider the previous condition, opinions, and character of mankind, will find himself conducted anew to the same subject by a different route, and brought to view it under a different aspect. The study of ancient philosophy lies before him. He must make himself familiar with forms of error, and modes of exhibiting truth, very different from those to which he has been accustomed. He must become, as it were, an inquisitive traveller in a strange country, among men who use a new language ; and he will see around him much, of which he cannot at once comprehend the reason, the origin, or the relations. The philosophy of every age has

had a powerful influence upon the contemporary forms of religion professed among Christians. But it is of essential importance to be acquainted with that philosophy, which prevailed when Christianity was first taught ; because this, as I have said, was the parent of many of those errors which still exist, and which now, made hoary by time, are regarded with a veneration to which they are wholly without title.

In the study of ecclesiastical history, in order to estimate justly the facts and characters which it brings before us, a profound and thorough knowledge of human nature is required. And this study may reciprocally teach us more of the human character than perhaps any other. It will show us the best and worst passions operated upon by the strongest motives. It will teach us to think at once more highly and more humbly of man, and discover to us all his strength, all his weakness, and all his inconsistency. It will show us the strange forms in which his virtues may appear, and the infamous disguises which his vices may assume. It will show us the most remarkable and apparently the most heterogeneous combinations

of moral and intellectual qualities. It will present to us, in every variety, those complex characters which it is so difficult to estimate ; because they exhibit the worldly and selfish passions in alliance with religion, and it is hard to determine to what point the latter is debased, or how far the former may be modified by the connexion ; to what degree self deception may exist, and how far it is to be admitted as an excuse ; or how far the errors and vices of the age may be pleaded in apology for those of the individual. It will teach us, that even powerful minds may be paralyzed by the touch of superstition ; that there is no depth of debasement to which the human understanding may not be reduced ; and that there is nothing so unmeaning, so false, so shocking, or so self contradictory, that it may not be received for divine truth ; as in some ages and countries, animals the most noxious and contemptible have been worshipped as deities.

But one of the most grateful studies of the theologian is to trace the real influence of the true principles of Christianity. He will delight to observe how much they have done to raise the character of man, and to improve

the condition of society. Going back into past ages, and becoming, as it were, a citizen of Athens or of Rome, making himself familiar with all that can be known of their manners, morals, religion, and political institutions, entering their schools to listen to the teaching of their philosophers, and their temples to observe their rites of worship, he will perceive how much the imagination has often disguised their moral depravity, their ignorance, and their miseries ; and will return to offer up thanks to God in a Christian church, that he was born among Christians.

The proper office of religious belief is the formation of character. Our faith teaches us, that we shall be happy or miserable in the future life, as we have done good, or done evil in the present. But what is good ? what is virtue ? These are inquiries which the theologian has to answer. It may be said, perhaps, that as far as regards practice, they are easily settled. When the question is merely, whether some particular action be lawful or not, *this*, I allow, is easily settled, in the great majority of cases of common occurrence, by one who will not let his passions

triumph over his judgment. But, at the same time, it is not to be forgotten, that different nations, different sects of Christians, and different individuals have held opposite opinions upon many subjects of morals of no small practical importance. You think religious persecution, a profanation of the name of Christianity, and an outrage upon the first principles of natural justice. But a little more than a century ago, it was thought to be one of the first duties of a Christian community, and there was not a Christian community in the world by which this duty was neglected. I certainly do not mean to question the correctness of the decided opinion and strong feeling, which we all now have upon this subject ; but if any one be in the habit of ascribing a very high value to the authority of the church, it may startle him to recollect, that he has the authority of all Christendom against him from the fifth century to the end of the seventeenth. The question respecting persecution we may now indeed regard as at rest. But there have been many other mistakes in the Christian world as gross, though not quite as mischievous. Every one acquainted with ecclesiastical his-

tory knows, that very erroneous opinions have prevailed respecting the nature of Christian perfection, or in other words, respecting the nature of moral virtue. They have prevailed, and they still exist in a greater or less degree at the present day. There are too, at the present day, questions of no small practical importance, relating to particular points of morals, which are agitated among us. Some Christians, entitled to much respect for their virtues, deny the right of defensive war. There are, to give another example, some who allow a license in interpreting promises, affirmations, and oaths, which appears to others in a high degree criminal ; and who maintain, for instance, the lawfulness of professing to believe articles of faith which they do not believe. The nature and extent of the duties of active benevolence, of those duties which require something to be done, in contradistinction from those which require something to be avoided, are very imperfectly understood. Different men have different notions of right and wrong, and estimate very differently the requisitions of duty ; and they adopt in consequence very different modes of conduct. As it respects the principles of morals,

there is still less agreement than with regard to the practice. There are moralists, who contend that some one particular motive, which they select from all others, is in every case necessary to constitute an action virtuous. There are others, who allow that there are many motives which all partake of the nature of virtue. Those too who admit but one, differ most widely from each other as to the nature of this one ; some, for instance, resolving all virtue into perfect selfishness, and others into perfect benevolence. With different opinions respecting morals, men may practise in a considerable degree alike ; but it would be idle to contend, that their opinions have no influence upon their practice, and none upon their character and happiness. From the inseparable connexion, which I have stated, between theology and morals, it is the business of the theologian, as well as the moral philosopher, to study the principles of the latter science, and to trace out their true bearing upon the conduct of men. He knows but little of the subject, who does not know that these are inquiries, which will try and task the understanding to its utmost strength. Morality is not to be determined

by our first impressions ; nor is it a matter of intuitive judgment. We cannot be sure that all which we have been taught concerning it is true. It has been too hastily said that it is a science which admits of no discoveries. Morality is now better understood than in former times, and it will, we may believe, be better understood by our posterity, than it is by us.

The ultimate objects of a theologian should be to improve his own character, and the moral condition of his fellow men. But in order to effect the latter purpose, it is necessary to understand the human character. The complicated machinery of the mind is easily deranged ; and no small mischief has been often produced by the ill directed attempts of the ignorant and violent to regulate and put it in motion. You have undertaken to be a guide to the erring, and an instructor of the ignorant. You have undertaken to lead men in the path of virtue and holiness. Take care that you do not repel them from it, or lead them astray. It is not so simple a work as you may imagine. A sentence may undo the effect of a sermon. It is the office of a theologian to administer the medicine of the

mind ; and in order to do this, he should be acquainted with its general constitution, and the diseases to which it is liable. And how is this necessary knowledge of human nature to be acquired ? In the first place, by distinctly perceiving the truth, that it is a kind of knowledge which may and ought to be acquired ; that it does not come merely by chance or by intuition. Every one judges of the characters of those around him ; but how few judge correctly ? In no science is it so necessary, as in the science of human nature, for the learner to be first convinced of his ignorance. In order to remove this ignorance, we must study our own hearts. We must be in the habit of analyzing those complex aggregates of motives from which we usually act, and of giving to every individual motive its true name. We must observe how we ourselves are affected by the actions and words of others, how often the effect produced is different from that intended, and we must remark why it is so. We must study human life as it lies around us, presenting phenomena scarcely less various, and scarcely less difficult of explanation, than those of the material world. We must remark the in-

fluence of those circumstances, which operate so powerfully to mould the character in its formation, and to produce those subsequent changes, which often render it, in advanced life, not less different from what it was in youth, than the countenance itself ; so that like that it retains only something like the outline of its former features. We must acquaint ourselves with the principle of association, that great law of the mind, which it is so important to regulate ; and which, when not controlled from within or without, operates with such blind agency, binding together thoughts and sentiments and feelings in the most mischievous connexion. We must observe how often this law is directed to the production of evil, by the want of consideration, or judgment, or temper in those who undertake the business of moral instruction. We must study the volume of human history with its numberless pages, and learn the nature of man from his past actions and works. We must be acquainted with those productions, in which the human character is justly exhibited by the great masters of the art, and in which poetry and eloquence give a vivid expression of human feelings and sen-

timents. We must study those writings in which a mild philosophy has shed a steady illumination upon the mind and heart of man ; and those also, in which, as in the histories of Tacitus, flashes are, every now and then, breaking forth, which send light into the recesses where the passions hide themselves. I touch rapidly upon some of the more prominent objects of attention, and leave others without notice. But the knowledge of human nature is a science ; and if in this, as in other branches of knowledge, some have a natural aptitude for its acquisition more than others, yet our acquirements will depend much upon our exertions. It is a science too, which, though the fact does not seem to have been generally observed, has shared with every other in the progress of improvement. Our knowledge of all those principles and motives, which affect and influence the mind and heart of man, is more extensive and correct than the knowledge of those who have preceded us.

To complete the character of a perfect theologian, and to qualify one for those duties to which among us a theologian is commonly called, he must be an eloquent writer and

speaker. Knowledge of human nature is the foundation of eloquence, but it is not the only requisite to its attainment. To write or speak so as powerfully to affect others, one must study those arts by which the mind is disciplined to attain this object, arts not of arbitrary invention, as some have imagined, but founded deep in the essential principles of human nature. The clear perception of truth will not alone give us power to exhibit it distinctly. To feel strongly ourselves is not the only thing required to enable us to produce strong sympathy in others. But on these topics I forbear to dwell. He who would understand what force and what effort of mind are necessary to consummate eloquence, may study those works, in which the great Roman orator has at once celebrated and exemplified the art of which he was master.

It remains to consider what preparatory studies are required in the attainment of theological knowledge. A theologian must be familiar with the ancient languages. But this is not all. As it respects the modern languages, we must not confine ourselves to the sources of information which may be found in our own. There are many works of much

value to a theologian in the French and German. In Germany, for the last forty or fifty years, the science of theology has been more cultivated than in any other country ; though certainly not altogether with the happiest results. Nobody, I trust, will imagine, that I admire the licentious, and, as it seems to me, the most extravagant and untenable speculations of some of the modern German theologians. In reading their works, I find what I cannot but regard as theories and arguments of impalpable inanity ; I seem, like Æneas when entering the confines of the dead, to be passing through a region of monstrous shadows, and to be, like him, pursuing a journey,

*Quale per incertam Lunam, sub luce maligna,
Est iter in sylvis.*

Some of these theologians, who have attained a certain degree of celebrity out of their own country, are, I think, little entitled to any kind of respect. To others of them, I should be disposed to apply the character which Thirlby, in the celebrated dedication of his edition of Justin Martyr, gives of Isaac Vossius, a character which could not be more descriptive of any individual, than it is of a class of writers. "He had great learning, superior genius, and

judgment too, which, if not very great, was enough and more than enough for one, who, unless I am entirely deceived, cared but little about discovering the truth upon any subject. He made it his object to seek for and invent new, out of the way, and wonderful opinions in criticism, in philosophy, and in theology. Whether they were true or not, he left to be examined by those who might think themselves interested in the matter.”* But this character is far from being applicable to the whole body of modern German theologians. There are many who are not entitled to the praise; and some who are not obnoxious to the censure. Some have executed laborious works of great value; and others have written with much sobriety and good sense, as well as learning and ingenuity. As it respects the mass of those works, with

* “*Erant in eo homine multæ literæ, ingenium excellens, judicium etiam, si non maximum, at tantum quantum ei satis superque fuit, qui, nisi omnia me fallunt, quid in quavis re verum esset, leviter curavit perspicere. Satis habuit nova, devia, mirabilia, in critica, in philosophia, in theologia, quærere et excogitare: vera ane falsa essent, id vero aliis exquirendum reliquit, qui sua istuc interesse existimarent.*”

which we can become acquainted only through a knowledge of the German language, their value, without doubt, has been by some considerably overrated; nor would it be safe to recommend the indiscriminate study of them to one apt to estimate the truth of opinions by their novelty. But still the value of many of these works is such, as to render a knowledge of the language very desirable to the theological student, and necessary to a consummate theologian.

In enumerating the intellectual qualifications necessary, I have perhaps convinced you, that *it is impossible to be a theologian*. In the highest and most comprehensive sense of the word, I do not know but it may be so. I shall have done some service, if I have convinced you, that it is no easy thing to acquire those qualifications, which a theologian, in the more popular sense of the word, may be fairly expected to possess. More, a great deal more, is necessary than a familiar acquaintance with some system of technical divinity, and with the arguments by which this is usually defended. Much more is required than that knowledge which a man may collect from reading a few books in our

own language, and those perhaps the books of a particular sect. Much more than a familiarity with those metaphysical quibbles, which show how much morbid ingenuity may remain, while common sense is entirely prostrated ; and which, at the same time, like words of magic, darken the whole creation of God to those by whom they are pronounced. Much more than to be able to quote a mass of texts indiscriminately from different books of the Bible, and to interpret them conformably to the use of words in that theological dialect, which we may have learnt in childhood. And much more is required than a facility in running through all those errors, which our church, or our party, may have faithfully preserved, since the time when the science, of which I speak, lay in a state of the lowest debasement. True theology has little to do with any of these acquirements. It is a science of vast extent and dignity, embracing all the knowledge which directly or remotely concerns man as an immortal being. We believe, indeed, and we regard it as the glory of the science, that its most important truths, and the main arguments by which these are defended, may be made intelligible

to all; that in its last results it coincides with the first judgments of unprejudiced reason; and that the man of plain good sense, who exercises his understanding, and thinks for himself, and the profound and intelligent scholar, will find that there are no essential points of difference in their opinions. We may all arrive at last upon common ground, where the highest and humblest may meet together. But if any one refuse to submit to the decisions of our natural reason, and the dictates of our natural feelings; if he come to us, teaching what he calls incomprehensible propositions, and truths above reason; if he maintain doctrines abhorrent to all our best sentiments respecting God and his moral government; and if he require us to believe the system which he has received; we have a right to require of him in return, what are his qualifications to discuss these subjects? How extensively has he examined, how profoundly has he thought upon their nature and relations? How thoroughly has he acquired all that preparatory knowledge, which is necessary in their investigation? What is the compass of his studies, and what the reach of his faculties, that he thinks his judgments of so much

value, and his censures of so much authority? Has he in fact gone through that long course of discipline, necessary to enable him to decide questions of science and criticism, as they arise in the study of theology? We shall find, in many cases, that our new teacher is just as well qualified for the work which he has undertaken, as one with or without a little elementary knowledge of mathematics, would be qualified to decide on the truth of the demonstrations of Newton or La Place. Is theology, the most profound and extensive of sciences, the only one in which ignorant presumption may be allowed to dogmatize? It has indeed done this, and it has done much more. It has oppressed and persecuted. Hence it is that the progress of truth has been so slow and embarrassed. The operation of vulgar prejudices and passions has restrained the intellect of the wisest, and checked the courage of the boldest; and the science has in consequence not yet attained that rank and estimation which belong to it. It has been degraded by the irruptions of ignorance and barbarism; its provinces have been seized upon, and the rightful possessors of the soil driven away.

I shall then have effected something, if I have given you any just views of the importance and dignity of this science. It is in truth the highest philosophy, including every thing most interesting in speculation and practice. In proportion as it is better understood, and taught, the minds of men will be more enlightened, and their moral principles and feelings elevated and improved. And it will be better understood and taught. The obstacles which have opposed its progress are continually giving way. The human understanding will not much longer submit to such reasoning on the subjects of theology, as on every other subject it has learned to treat with contempt. The prejudice, before which the world bowed but yesterday, will tomorrow find *none so poor to do it reverence*. Let us consider how much the cause of true religion, and virtue, and happiness, for they are all inseparably connected, has been advanced even during the two last centuries. Let us consider how much may be gained in the ages to come, if we are but faithful to our posterity, and they are but faithful to themselves. It is but two centuries since Grotius lived ;

since the time when he was struggling against ignorance, and persecution, and *oppositions of science falsely so called*, to guide his contemporaries in the way to truth. His contemporaries, in return, attempted to confine and extinguish within the walls of a prison, that light which was to spread itself through the world. They drove him from his native land; and when the shades of death were about to close upon him, he might have looked round and seen not a single country free from the oppression of ecclesiastical tyranny; and only one in which any religion unmixed with the grossest error enjoyed even a doubtful toleration; only one where a few harassed individuals had found a temporary refuge, from which they were just about to be driven.—What deep and holy joy would have filled the mind of this great man, if a prophetic vision could have been accorded to him of what we now behold around us; if amid his labors, and disappointments, and sufferings, he could have been assured, that he had not labored nor suffered in vain; if he could have foreseen that in this country,—which was then just appearing within the

political horizon, but which even then had attracted his attention, and been one object of his extensive studies,—a vast empire was to be established, throughout which the principles of religious liberty should be fully recognized, and in which such a large portion of the community should understand so well the real character, and feel so powerfully the true influence of our religion. But there is a promise of fairer and happier days to the whole civilized world. The light of Christianity has been obscured, and men have been travelling in darkness. But the thick vapours which concealed earth and heaven are breaking away; and we begin to perceive the beautiful prospect which lies before us, and the glittering of spires and pinnacles in the distance.

In enumerating the intellectual acquisitions necessary to constitute a consummate theologian, I have felt some apprehension, like that which Cicero expresses, when about to speak of those requisite in an orator: “*Vereor ne tardem studia multorum, qui desperatione debilitati, experiri nolint, quod se assequi posse diffidant.*” In respect to this,

however, I may say as he does : “ *Sed par est omnes omnia experiri, qui res magnas, et magno opere expetendas, concupiverunt. Quod si quem aut natura sua, aut illa præstantis ingenii vis forte deficiet, aut minus instructus erit magnarum artium disciplinis ; teneat tamen eum cursum, quem poterit. Prima enim sequentem, honestum est in secundis, tertiisque consistere.*” All the knowledge which the theological student acquires will be valuable. Whatever faculties he cultivates may be turned to account. It would be a poor reason to neglect to do any thing, because there is so much which may be done to advantage.

It is to our clergy that we must look for a body of learned theologians. It is through them principally, that the benefits of this science are to be derived to the community. But in order that they may become qualified for their office, the means of education must be afforded them ; and leisure must be afforded them to pursue their studies, when the work of education is finished. The standard of preaching is very high with us ; and it certainly is not desirable that it should be lowered. But this being the case, the mere

weekly round of a clergyman's labors has been found in some situations too severe, and even destructive of health and life. We have witnessed the terrible spectacle of men of the finest genius perishing under the slow torture of unremitted mental exertion. Something has been done to prevent the recurrence of this awful calamity; and means might be easily devised—but it is not here the place to point them out—to lessen that pressure of duties which is still too great. It is with theology, as with every other department of knowledge and literature; if we would have them flourish among us, we must show that we are able to estimate their value, and the worth of those services which are devoted to their cultivation. We must not be *slowly wise*, nor *meanly just*. In conferring public rewards, there is nothing more opposite to true wisdom, than a calculating spirit of parsimony. Our literary men have been pursuing their labors under peculiar disadvantages; and we must be ready to afford every facility and every encouragement to their exertions; to extend a steady patronage to our literary institutions, to increase our public libraries,

and to enlarge all our means of knowledge. We must be generous, and considerate, and kind ; ready to praise and approve where praise and approbation are merited ; liberal in our rewards, and reasonable in our demands.

If we would not have our country, with all its immeasurable resources, become a sort of barbaric empire ; if we would not have a half-civilized population spread over our soil, ignorant of all which adorns, and ennobles, and purifies the character of man ; if we would not be overrun with every form of fanaticism and folly ; if we desire that our intellectual and moral rank should keep pace with our unceasing enlargement as a nation ; if we desire that just notions of religion, and correct principles of duty should manifest their influence, and convey their blessings through the community ; if we love our native land, and rejoice in its honor, and should be humbled in its degradation ; we must recollect that good and evil are before us, and that it is for us to choose which we will ; but that the one is not to be avoided, nor the other secured, by accident. What we may become

will depend upon ourselves ; not upon what we may wish, but upon what we may do. The character of its intellectual men gives its character to a nation. That literature which is without morals and without Christian faith, like the literature of France during the age of Voltaire, is one of the worst evils to which God in his anger ever abandons a people. That literature which throughout regards men as his creatures and as immortal beings, is one of the greatest blessings which he ever confers. As for those who are engaged in the studies of which I have been speaking, they have motives enough, in whatever situation they may be, to call forth all their efforts. But in our country, where so much is at stake ; where the last experiment seems to be making, to determine what man may become, when placed in the most favorable circumstances ; where every thing is in a forming state, and so much depends upon the impressions now received, and the direction now given, the motives of which I speak, acquire an overwhelming force. What must be the responsibility of those who are engaged in studies, which have so direct an in-

fluence upon the character and condition of men ! And what consciousness of desert can be more honorable or more animating than his, who feels that he is directing all his efforts, that he is devoting the whole energy of his mind, that he is pouring himself out like water, to swell the tide, which is to bear his country on to happiness and glory !





